

AN APPEAL TO ENGLISH NONCONFORMISTS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE DAILY TELEGRAPH."

SIR,—Although I have no claim upon your valuable space, I shall feel indebted if I am permitted in your columns to give utterance to my regret at what is about to take place. It is to be proposed, in the name of the Liberals of England and Scotland, and by a Prime Minister who has done gigantic services on the side of the Liberal party, that a million of capable citizens, guiltless of crime against the Empire, shall be taken down from the rank to which they were born—the rank of citizens on a par with men in Yorkshire or the Lothians—and shall be reduced to the grade of citizens on condition; the condition being that before they can enjoy the immunities of the Empire they must first be subjects of the Irish National League, and take their laws from a Parliament formed of men selected by its seventeen hundred branches.

Being one of those who have always held that every inequality inflicted by law on any class of our fellow-subjects should be removed, I have gladly supported Mr. Gladstone in every step taken in that direction. As in the past so, to-day, I should claim for the peasant in Mayo or Clare precisely the same rights as for the peasant in Antrim, Kent, or Perthshire; should claim for the Roman Catholic priest the same freedom, and the same protection of the laws, as for every other minister of religion, neither more nor less; and should claim for Ireland or its provinces precisely the same measure of local self-government as for any portions of England, Scotland or Wales. Exceptional legislation

as for any class, or as against any class, I hold to be first wrong and then mischievous.

These principles, however, condemn what is now demanded on behalf of the Roman Catholic majority in Ireland. What they claim is not the removal of any inequality, or the abolition of any exceptional privileges. It is the founding in their own favour, by exceptional legislation, of new privileges, in both legislative and executive power. They claim what no three or four millions out of thirty-five millions possess or would dream of claiming—namely, that they shall themselves be exempted from the balancing control of the thirty millions of the United Kingdom; and, further, that the loyal Irish shall be deprived of the safeguard afforded by the same balancing control.

Is it not the same case as if the Nonconformists of Scotland and Wales, instead of asking that they should be relieved of inequalities upheld by law in favour of a minority, and asking it loyally and peaceably, should ask to be relieved from all legislative control but their own; also to have in each case the minority subjected to their legislation—ay, and should ask this with menace to life, to property, to the very forms of the national Legislature itself?

We are told of Home Rule in the Colonies. Was there ever a case in which a colony was handed over to a disloyal majority, supported by violently hostile sympathisers in America, and that in face of the protests and entreaties of a loyal minority in distress, at great danger, as they believe, to both their civil and religious interests?

Home Rule in the case of a colony meant that people previously destitute of any place in the Imperial Legislature were taken out of the pupillage of the Colonial Office and raised to Parliamentary Government. It did not mean that people possessed of hereditary rights in the Imperial Legislature were to be subjected to the yoke of a local majority, which they dreaded. Once more, in descriptions of the organisation of the National League, we are told how its officers declared that its branches numbered 1,700, and that in almost every case a priest was either the president or secretary. Now, was there ever a colony in which every district was ruled by a junta, headed by a Roman Catholic priest?

Take the Liberals of any Roman Catholic country—say Belgium, France, Bavaria, or Italy—and ask them:—Given a section of a united kingdom, with three-fourths Roman Catholics and one-fourth Protestants, the Roman Catholics being organised in local committees, presided over by priests, and claiming that the national Legislature shall cease to make laws for both parties in common, and leave that to a local chamber; would it be liberal policy to carry that wish into effect? They would say such a policy would be impossible to a Liberal statesman, would scarcely be possible to a Conservative one, would be that of a reactionary or a clerical one.

We are told of Home Rule in the United States. Was there ever a State with this system of priest-ruled juntas, or ever a State where laws were not subjected to a supreme court, above even the national legislature? Home Rule, or States Rights, has already cost America four years of civil war, and may cost trouble again.

So long as Mr. Gladstone was redressing inequalities or injustice, those of us who could only smile at promises of “settling,” “satisfying,” and “reconciling,” were bound to support him as much as if we believed in such illusions; just because the principles were liberal, and the attempt to give effect to them right. But it is another matter when Mr. Gladstone comes forward proposing to erect new and exceptional powers for one section of population, and from another section, not less worthy, to shear away their born rights and their protection vehemently prized. Does not Mr. Gladstone here cross the line of equal rights? Does he not allow himself to be carried off the Liberal ground—that of free and equal legislation—on to the high Tory ground of employing authority to put down equal rights, and to set up physical might and ecclesiastical pretension?

We are told that the men of Ulster are only 800,000, and even if they do rebel, the 30,000,000 of England and Scotland can put them down. Yes; thirty to one would put them down. But do Englishmen and Scotchmen feel that it would be right to put the bayonet, thirty to one, to the breast of every Irish Loyalist, and say: Submit to the Priests' Parliament?

If the Nonconformists of England and Scotland allow them-

selves to be manipulated to the hurt of their fellow Protestants in Ireland, by setting up Roman ascendancy (where they, on principle, helped to put down Protestant ascendancy), they will do a great injustice to the cause of civil and religious liberty, of which they have in the past been the pioneers and watchmen all over the world. Happily for them, they can but imperfectly judge the case ; no man can well judge of it unless he has lived in Ireland, or in the Roman States or Naples, when they were ruled by priests. The principles of Nonconformists led them fearlessly up to the line of equal rights—a line to which, for them, Mr. Gladstone never came. The same principles call them to stand like men, as soon as it is proposed to pass that line by conferring on one body exceptional powers, and depriving another of protection inherited, needed, and violating the equal rights of no man. I cannot conceive how any Nonconformist, Scotch or English, after time has allowed the first impetus of party cohesion to subside, can for a moment think of depriving the Protestants of Ireland of the civil and religious guarantees which the Constitution accords to them, and of placing them in the power of a Parliament composed as they know one in Dublin would be composed. If they stand by and see this effected, they will undo much of the work done by their fathers, and will leave to their children weary tasks in attempting to repair breaches made by their unfaithfulness.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

WILLIAM ARTHUR,
Ex-President Wesleyan Conference.

London, April 24.